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SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY, OPPOSITION REACT TO CALLS FOR THIRD TERM
FOR PRESIDENT TANDJA

REF: NIAMEY 1066

Summary

¶1. Over the past several months speculation has mounted in the local media, within civil society, and in political circles about President Tandja's political intentions to seek a third term through an amendment to the country's constitution, which limits the presidential office to two five-year terms. While on several occasions the president has dismissed the option of seeking any extension, he has shown restraint toward current increasing calls asking him to do so and growing criticism urging him to refrain. After a series of statements by various civil society groups sounding the alarm, the political opposition is also becoming more vocal. End Summary.

Calls for President Tandja to Continue in Office

¶2. On August 5, in an editorial following the celebration of Niger's Independence Day and the laying of the first stone of the Kandadji dam, the head of the government communication unit said in evocative terms, "Mr. President, Nigeriens still need you." On August 8, during a talk show on public television, GON Minister of Communications and Government Spokesman Mohamed Ben Omar called on Nigeriens not to allow "amateurish politicians" to lead the country. In September, the Party for Concertation and Peace (PCP) issued a statement supporting President Tandja's work and announcing its intention to include the revision of the constitution on the agenda of the National Council for Political Dialogue (CNDP). The CNDP, an advisory body made up of 39 political parties, rejected the PCP's request.

¶3. On October 12, a group of Islamic associations declared that there were no term limits for a leader (reftel). Following the Zinder march on October 31 (reftel), similar movements took place in November in the regional capitals of Agadez, Tahoua, Tillabery, Maradi, and Niamey with chants of "tazarce" (a Hausa term roughly meaning "stay the course") to encourage President Tandja to continue his work. These calls also urged the National Assembly, the civil society, and political parties to allow the president to do so.

Civil Society, Political Parties Warn Against Extension

¶4. Various civil society groups have denounced and warned against any attempt to revise the constitution in order to extend limits in presidential terms. On November 4, local sections of political parties in Zinder reacted to the march of third term supporters. In a joint statement, the Social Democratic Convention (CDS), the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), the Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ADP), and the African Democratic Rally (RDA)

denounced a spin by the governor of Zinder, and indicated "their will to defend the President against those who incite him to violate his Koranic oath." The same group of parties made a similar statement in Maradi.

¶5. In Tillabery, the local sections of the PNDS and the National Convergence (CONIR) issued a joint statement to call on the president to abide by the oath of office. They warned "all those who fear change and vie with deceit and opportunism to maintain their unearned income regardless of the true aspirations of the people" to brace themselves.

¶6. In Niamey, the federal executive board of the PNDS (the main opposition party) noted in a statement that the current political stability in Niger was built by all political parties and "allowed the design, negotiation, and implementation of several beneficial actions for the country." The PNDS Niamey federal executive board further said that it would oppose any violation of the constitution.

It encouraged the President to commence preparations for transparent and fair elections in order to move Niger to the level of true democracies. The PNDS federal executive board said it would use all legal means to protect the President against those who want to make him renounce his oath and to miss an honorable exit after all the loyal services he had rendered to the nation.

¶7. On November 20, the Confederation Democratique des Travailleurs du Niger (CDTN), the nation's second largest labor union confederation, issued a statement denouncing the ongoing marches calling for President Tandja to seek a third term. The CDTN said the marches, made under the pretense of exercising freedom of expression, were an affront to the constitution and encouraged President Tandja to violate his oath of office. The CDTN noted that the president is the first protector of the constitution, and that

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he had therefore a duty to uphold its provisions. Finally, the CDTN called on civil society to join efforts to prevent abuse of the constitution.

¶8. Also on November 20, the civil society umbrella organization Coordination de la Societe Civile Nigerienne (CSCN) denounced the "tazarce" movement, referring to it as a dangerous move aimed at "killing democracy" in Niger. The CSCN called on the president to comply with the constitution and abide by his oath of office.

¶9. The November 12 issue of a local opposition newspaper, "La Roue de L'Histoire", published on its front page a letter from Prime Minister Seini Oumarou, chairperson of the National Council for Political Dialogue (CNDP), calling a CNDP meeting to examine National Voter Registration Committee progress, a Constitutional change and measures for compliance with the law on the classification of senior government positions.

Comment

¶9. While "tazarce" marches receive nationwide coverage by state media and are received by government officials and traditional chiefs in all regions, opponents of this movement say that authorities in Niamey have denied them access to public media, despite the fact that they have paid for such coverage. Others state that third mandate proponents hold signs at the front of crowds of people assembled to see President Tandja, wherein most participants have no idea that the signs are present and are not espousing opinions on whether or not he should remain in power. There are rumors that opposition political parties will issue a statement on the political situation in Niger in late November. On the other hand, President Tandja may use the occasion of December 18, Founding of the Republic Day, to make his intentions known.

¶11. A review of Niger's constitution and legal framework finds no support for an effort to extend a president's term of office. Article 36 of the constitution provides that the President is elected for a term of five years, and he can be re-elected once. Article 136 states that the provisions of Article 36 of the constitution shall not be subject to revision. Furthermore, Article

2, paragraph 4 of law 2004-46 of June 16, 2004, on the referendum process states, "no text relating to the provisions of Article 136 of the Constitution shall be subject to a referendum." End
Comment.

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